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ABSTRACT

The values of higher education -- the beliefs that govern the conduct and define the goals of American higher education -- are examined in relation to society as a whole. It is suggested that there is evidence of good intentions, good will, and remarkable social advances, but also a lack of sense of direction. Each of these contradictory images is related to educational issues. The values held by individuals and the nation will largely be determined by the kind of education the liberal arts college has provided. If a reconstituted and generally acceptable value system is to be conceived and disseminated among the members of society, the centers of learning must take a large part of the responsibility for doing so. The integration of knowledge and values could be more successfully accomplished in the curriculum if courses were organized around specific problems that society faces (e.g., crime). To design such new curricular patterns and reconstruct the present typical course offering will require unprecedented moral commitments and expenditures of energy. If this is done, units of instruction could give students in liberal arts colleges the basic facts, intellectual skills, and continuing sources of information needed to make sound judgments. (LBH)

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Topical Paper No. 2

VALUES AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Earl J. McGrath

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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VALUES AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

EARL J. McGRATH

Professor-in-Residence
of
Higher Education

Higher Education Program
College of Education
University of Arizona

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Before dealing with values and education, it is essential to clarify two issues: 1) What do we mean when we speak of values? 2) What is the nature and the condition of the society in which we live that today's educational institutions are called upon to serve?

Speaking to the first issue, one must note that there are many definitions of "values," but one student of the subject for many years has given the term a meaning that I consider acceptable. Milton Rokeach, Professor of Sociology and Psychology at Washington State University, defines a value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance."

Before we attempt to examine the beliefs that govern the conduct and define the goals of higher education in the United States--in other words, the values of higher education--let us address the second issue: Realistically speaking, what kind of society do we live in? Two contradictory pictures emerge. On the one hand there is evidence of good intentions and good will among our people and of remarkable social advances. At the same time, however, contemporary society appears to lack a sense of direction and may indeed be collapsing upon itself. Let's look more carefully at each view.

On the surface, over the past two centuries, compared with other societies, the amelioration of the conditions of life for the average American has been unparalleled. With all its inadequacies and inequities, on balance, our culture still deserves admiration and its traditional social institutions merit emulation. The events of recent days have proved the strength of our constitutional government. It is evident that our people will not tolerate corruption, barratry, perjury, and police-state tactics at the highest level of government. Opinion polls as well as shifts in voting show that the instinct for decency in governmental and human relations still stirs the majority of citizens to action when they discover that their basic moral or civic code is being violated.

As measured by standards of freedom, social mobility, and general well-being, America also still stands high. In contrast, people in the Communist countries enjoy little political and social liberty and the standard of living falls far below our own. Even in those nations recently unyoked from colonialism, dictators or military oligarchies predominantly rule. Freedom of speech and political action are commonly suppressed, vested economic and social interests protected, and aid from wealthier countries used for the benefit of the ruling class rather than for the alleviation of human degradation and social ills. In spite of its patent deficiencies, our political and social system still affords the most effective apparatus for enhancing the lives of its citizens and protecting the common good.

In terms of our personal concern for the poor, the sick, the handicapped, and those who strive to better their condition, as a people

we rate very high. Quite aside from the billions of dollars spent by federal, state, and local governments for health, education, and welfare programs, no other people can match the voluntary outlay of funds by private citizens and philanthropic organizations. The less fortunate in other lands in the material satisfactions of life regularly receive our help through public and private channels, and as a Canadian recently remarked, we are often the first and the most generous people in aiding other nationals stricken by floods, earthquakes, epidemics, and other disasters. Concern for our fellow human beings here and abroad is reflected in the enormous sums voluntarily contributed to philanthropic agencies. In 1974, for example, the Red Cross received from its fund campaign alone contributions of $125,553,000. CARE, ministering primarily to the needs of other nationals, sent abroad money or material valued at $18,633,402 which, supplemented by host governments in the year ending on June 30, 1974, rose to a total of $109,011,414. In 1973-74, colleges and universities received $2,240,000,000 in gifts, a considerable proportion of which enabled young people of limited or no means to gain the advantages of a higher education.

Without invidious comparisons, it can be said in respect to the satisfaction of primary human needs that the United States can justly claim preeminence among the nations. It is unnecessary to pile up more than I have already the available mountains of evidence proving the values which animate the concerns of our people for their fellowmen at home and abroad.

That is one picture of the kind of society in which we live. From its vantage point, the educational enterprise has been successful in fashioning a world that believes in the worth of human beings and accepts the responsibility of caring for one another--beliefs that nearly everyone would applaud as worthy "values."

But there is another picture of American and Western society; one sharply in contrast to the first that suggests that higher education has been acting on a much different set of beliefs with much different consequences for us all. Its outline can be sketched like this:

The human enterprise is in a chaotic and confused condition. For several decades the internal decay of Western culture and its waning position in the world community have been observed by students of history and current affairs. Wells, Spengler, Toynbee, and Mumford--to mention but a few leading thinkers--have commented on the deterioration of the quality of life: especially in the democratic societies. The pessimism of these men of philosophic mind about the human condition has recently spread to the members of society who are less well informed about the great movements of history and the momentous events of the day. Here in the United States there is evidence of a feeling of futility among our people. An increasing number express attitudes of hopelessness and frustration. A convincing manifestation of their disillusionment is portrayed in their lack of confidence that either political party can govern the country with justice and quietude for all. The fiscal, political, and moral disarray in New York City and State are only symptomatic of more disturbing and widespread events to come.

The comments of Britishers on their forthcoming elections suggest that they, too, as a people feel that regardless of which party is in office the processes of government are no longer respected or prepared to deal with such tasks as stemming inflation or controlling taxes. Similar disillusive breakdowns in the orderly processes of living can be observed in Italy, France, and other Western nations. More disturbing perhaps are the conflicts in some of the more recently established commonwealths where freedom from the evils of colonialism have been replaced not by respect for human dignity but by vicious forms of tyranny and a total abandonment of the principle of the resolution of differences through the exercise of reason.

In a recent article published in The National Observer, staff writer Wesley Pruden, Jr., reviewed interviews that he conducted in a host of countries with individuals representing a cross section of the population concerning their outlook on life and the future of human society. The various headlines of his report--"Deepening Problems Cause World-Wide Pessimism, Dim Hopes of 'Better Tomorrow'" and "World-Wide Pessimism Feeds on Unsolvable Problems"--reflect the despair and frustration that pervades the world at large. Although the relatively good conditions of life in the United States mitigate the extreme feeling of hopelessness elsewhere, there is abundant evidence that we also as individuals and as a nation are at sixes and sevens. Pruden highlights the crux of the issue when he quotes Ralf Dahrendorf, director of the London School of Economics:

> We have reached a point in our societies in which there is no agreement on some of the essential rules within which one disagrees, and it is this disagreement about the rules which has led us halfway back to Hobbes, the first chapter of Leviathan, and "all against all."

Andrew Hacker, a professor of history at Cornell University, takes an even dimmer view of our national prospects. In The End of the American Era, he sums up his cheerless outlook on our destiny as a people in the following words:

> The United States is now about to join other nations of the world which were once prepossessing and are now little more than plots of bounded terrain. Like them, the United States will continue to be inhabited by human life; however, Americans will no longer possess that spirit which transforms a people into a citizenry and turns territory into a nation. There eventually arrives a time when a preoccupation with private concerns deflects a population from public obligations. The share of energy devoted to common concerns gradually diminishes, and a willingness to be governed is less evident.
>
> America's terminal hour has arrived at a time when most Americans still see their nation as vigorous in potential and youthful in spirit. Few are prepared to consider the possibility that their country will never again experience the stature it has so recently known. The assumption of unending ascendancy, with its premise that man has the capacity to order his destiny, makes it all but impossible to suggest that the American interlude of nationhood will end. The very thought that America's history is no more than a finite interval has been repressed by a people persuaded of their exemption from the pitfalls which have fated other societies.

Two pictures of America and of the human enterprise. Which is representative of the real world that we live in? It is my belief that the second picture, for all its unpleasant features, cannot be ignored. In it we see the tragic disparity between, on the one hand, our faith that more education for an ever-larger percentage of our youth will produce individuals who share common values that recognize the

interdependence and worth of human kind and, on the other hand, a world in disarray and dissolution.

Those who still have hope that the human enterprise can be made liveable and who contemplate how this fateful goal might be achieved would do well to examine the relationship between the conditions of life today and our faith in education as a panacea for our social ills. The plain fact is education has neither in this country nor in others where it has been consistently extended over the past several centuries produced the beneficient results in the personal life of the citizen or in the national sphere that its advocates so ardently promised. With conviction, one can say that some of the most chaotic and humanly oppressive conditions have been perpetrated by, or permitted to occur in, the nations in which advanced education has been most accessible. Wars, economic hardship, internal conflict, crime (up 18% nationwide and 33% in Tucson from 1973 to 1974 according to the FBI's annual crime report released yesterday), and other social pathology have been characteristic of life in the West just at the time that education has been extended to ever larger percentages of the population. The recent remarks that James Billington, director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, addressed specifically to higher education obviously apply to the total educational enterprise:

> Perhaps the most ominous--and least understood--feature of revolutionary violence in the modern world is that it is the creation of educated people, not of primitive barbarians. It often arises within those institutions controlled by intellectuals: the universities... .
>
> The postindustrial West may be as vulnerable to this violence as was the preindustrial West. The intellectual population has never

> increased so rapidly as in the postwar era, and the internal crisis of modern intellectual life--its lack of shared values--creates a thirst for the combination of commitment and "relevance" that is hard to find in the modern multiversity... .
>
> If there is no commitment to shared values in Western society--and if none are imparted in our amoral institutions of higher learning--no increase in police and burglar alarms will suffice to preserve our society from the specter that haunts us--not a bomb from above but a gun from within.

It is clear that if education is to be a major instrument of social reconstruction and a means of improving the human lot it will have to be of a quite different character and have different purposes from those that have dominated the enterprise of learning for the past century: especially since World War I.

Contrary to a widespread opinion among the members of the academic community, the principal cause of the present questioning attitudes among the public at large is not a loss of faith or confidence in the value of education per se. By and large, the average citizen still believes in the efficacy of learning. Nor in spite of an evident public reluctance to increase expenditures for any public services--including education--are monetary considerations primarily at the basis of public aversion. Our people, who are in a questioning mood, seek not to undermine our educational institutions but to enlist their more effective assistance in restoring meaning and stability to our national and personal lives. If the traditional services of the liberal arts colleges in cultivating the traits of mind, character, and the spirit of a free people can be restored to the center of the entire enterprise of American higher education, they will receive the gratitude and the unreserved

support of a people who yearn for honest and informed enlightenment in dealing with the issues of the day.

It is my conviction that the values we live by as individuals and as a nation will largely be determined by the kind of education the liberal arts college has provided since the establishment of Harvard in 1636 and indeed in the colleges in the British universities centuries earlier--institutions from which our practices and policies of higher education traditionally flowed.

Further, I believe that the ability and willingness of the liberal arts colleges to establish and sustain such a unique set of purposes to which all members of the academic society will subscribe will in large measure determine their chances for survival. This view of the social responsibility of institutions of higher education as a whole has been expressed by thoughtful analysts inside and outside the academic community. For example, Lippmann, addressing the annual meeting of the American Council on Education in 1966, observed that:

> One of the great phenomena of the human condition in the modern age is the dissolution of the ancestral order, the erosion of established authority, and having lost the light and the leading, the guidance and the support, the discipline that the ancestral order provided, modern men are haunted by a feeling of being lost and adrift, without purpose and meaning in the conduct of their lives. The thesis which I am putting to you is that the modern void, which results from the vast and intricate process of emancipation and rationalization, must be filled, and that the universities must fill the void because they alone can fill it.

If a reconstituted and generally acceptable value system is to be conceived and disseminated among the members of society, the centers of learning must take a large part of the responsibility for doing so. Why then should scholars not place this matter high in the list of priorities

among the purposes of their research and teaching activities? The exclusion of the very aspects of life which give meaning to an individual's or a society's existence is one of the most difficult features to understand in the evolution of higher education in Western culture. What we believe in and what we stand for and the validity of our convictions in terms of personal happiness and national well-being ought to be the central subject of research and teaching in the entire educational system. The institutions of higher education have the greatest responsibility in this area of learning because they alone are able to put the whole apparatus of scholarship to work in studying our value commitments and evaluating their validity in relation to conditions of life today.

In view of the crisis in Western culture, the decreasing concern with values in the world of learning is a mystifying phenomenon, Rene Dubos, world-famous biologist, observing the confusion in the contemporary world resulting from the rejection of traditional value systems and the failure of the learning community to create alternatives to vacuous countercultures, has this comment to make on the need to reverse this disintegrating process if Western culture is to survive:

> One must be deaf and blind not to recognize that rich human values have come from belonging to a given nation and that these values have given particular national flavors to the joie de vivre.
>
> Both the religious and the national sense have become much weaker during the second half of the twentieth century and they have not yet been replaced by equivalent spiritual forces. Modern society is undergoing progressive disintegration; it has hardly begun to reform itself, still less to search for a really new form. The countercultures are readily defined by what they reject--the consumer society, colonialism in all its forms, economic and military nationalism--but none has yet

> formulated a positive doctrine that could serve as a new cohesive social force. They have failed in this task because, despite their brave claims, their proponents have not found a way to introduce new enriching experiences into their own lives....But there cannot be any true integration without a system of values accepted by the majority of the social group.

If the mechanistic, materialist, naturalistic dogma had been restricted in application to the physical sciences where its philosophical presuppositions and its methodology might have been defended as a means of advancing human thinking from an arid and mystical pedantry to a fruitful intellectual productiveness, the whole enterprise of higher education would be quite different from what it is today. Unfortunately, however, the disciplines concerned more directly with individual and societal behavior, eager to establish themselves on an intellectual par with those which produced "reliable" knowledge, adopted the latter's metaphysics, epistemology, and methodology. Aspects of reality related to human behavior refractory to the analytical treatment of science were nevertheless subjected to a methodology which often produced bodies of knowledge of irrefutable validity, but which shed little light on the purposeful behavior of the individual or the effectiveness of the entire social enterprise. Now, however, there is a growing unease among intellectuals of unimpeachable academic credentials who reject this limited approach to the understanding of men and the societies they make up.

A leading psychologist, Abraham Maslow, commenting on the separation of scientific facts and values, a practice he considers devitalizing to the disciplines concerned with the nature and destiny of man, states that:

> What I am doing, in effect, is striking blows at one of the root conceptions upon which classical science is based, namely, its supposed value-free nature, its belief that it can study only neutral facts, and that the world of facts is totally different from the world of values. Everything to do with values--in art, religion, justice, education, politics, ethics--is cast out of the realm of human cognition by such a conception of science.

In the humanities, as in the social sciences, there are intellectual leaders of acknowledged professional stature who are calling for a return to a concern with the great issues and perplexing problems of our time. One of these, Abraham Kaplan, one-time professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, in a penetrating analysis of the activities of professional philosophers, published under the title, The Travesty of the Philosophers, observes that:

> The gap is widening in our time between professional philosophers and the philosophies men live by. If what is important in life does not appear in professional work, or is brought in only to be negated, the work cannot have any place in the important contexts of life. Philosophy then becomes only an occupation, something incidental, while the life itself remains unexamined and thereby, as Socrates had it, not worth living. The gap between professed and lived philosophy makes action thoughtless and thought pointless.
>
> When we turn away from the things that are important on the face of it, we are not necessarily approaching fundamental matters; it might simply be that we are coming to occupy ourselves with trivialities.

The integration of knowledge and values could be more successfully accomplished in the curriculum if courses were organized around specific problems that society faces. Let us use the problem of crime as an illustration of the relationship between knowledge and social amelioration based on value commitments.

To get the essential and relevant facts bearing on the issues involved will, to be sure, require careful investigations by qualified

scholars in a variety of related fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, penology, medicine, government, nutrition, and others. If, however, the average educated person is to understand the cause of crime and the various steps that society can take to reduce it, he obviously cannot be expected to take a sequence of specialized courses in each of the related disciplines. To do so with respect to all the matters of present public concern, to say nothing of those which will inevitably arise in a swiftly changing culture, would be impossible in a four-year college experience, or for that matter in forty years. The same can be said with regard to ecological and other issues. One has only to follow the controversial debates on public policy related to ecological matters to observe that although a large body of technical knowledge is usually involved the decisions rest on issues involving human values. After all the facts are presented, some intelligent persons will believe it more important to preserve for future generations the natural beauty of our forests, fields, and streams, while others will place a higher value on the immediate satisfaction of our energy needs at low cost through the practice of strip mining. Similar alternate categories of priorities could be made for each issue on which society must reach a decision. They would reveal the fact that as indispensable as it may be, factual knowledge is not enough. If all the decisions in the last analysis involve basic value choices, the broad instructional units related to the problems already described must incorporate considerations of the human consequences of various alternative courses of action: that is, choices based on the things in life we cherish most highly.

To design such new curricular patterns and reconstruct the present typical course offering will require unprecedented moral commitments and expenditures of energy. Some efforts to clarify the purposes and to reorganize the content of liberal arts education are already being made, but current innovations are often little more than tinkering with existing modes rather than fundamental reforms to meet the needs of our times. To make this reconstruction expeditiously possible, faculty members will, at least temporarily, have to devote large portions of their professional time and energy to this goal. If sufficient effort is to be made to achieve the necessary revisions in policy and practice, faculty members will, for a period, have to be given large amounts of time freed from their regular responsibilities. Reconstructing the bridge from where we are in liberal education to where we ought to go cannot be done while the normal traffic continues to cross it.

If, however, the qualified representatives of the various disciplines undertook to bring together the facts essential to an illumination of each of these problems in meaningful relationships, units of instruction could be designed which would give all students in liberal arts colleges the basic facts, the intellectual skills, and the continuing sources of information needed to make sound judgments. To organize such instructional units will, however, involve taxing efforts and highly creative imagination. As the curriculum of most colleges is presently organized, it will not provide this kind of broad experience for the non-major student, and the large majority of students served by most departments are non-majors. The efforts in the 1930's and the 1940's to provide a suitable general education

for all college students to prepare them for personal fulfillment and enlightened citizenship aborted in the 1950's. A reascendance of specialism after the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957 caused a reversion to the old-fashioned distribution system--the dominant curricular structure today. Earlier attempts to make up general courses by assembling small units of subject matter from various disciplines were abandoned. They often consisted of a meaningless hodgepodge of unrelated elements. It should have surprised no one that if faculty members were unwilling or unable meaningfully to interrelate the subject matter of several disciplines, students were equally unsuccessful. Any attempt to revive these fruitless efforts to provide an adequate general education to deal with the problems of our time would be useless. This commanding task of curricular reconstruction requires a new, more radical approach.

Unlike the efforts of a quarter century ago, curricular reform should not begin with the subject interests of the faculty as represented in the present divisions of knowledge. The point of departure must be the human problems with which this and succeeding generations must deal--ecology, energy, crime, hunger, war, and the rest. Using these tangled situations in the human condition, scholars in the several fields of knowledge could bring together the relevant findings in their own disciplines. Working cooperatively with representatives of other divisions of knowledge, scholars could interrelate the subject matter of each in such ways as to illuminate the problems as they exist in the real-life situations of today's world. The rationale for such units of instruction would be found not in the internal logic of each subject but rather in

the realities of existence in a complex society. If fifty percent of the experiences of a college student embraced such broad instructional units, he would still have ample opportunity for an intensive major and for some electives in satisfying degree requirements. This is the kind of revision of goals and articulated curricular reconstruction that now demands the committed effort of the higher education establishment. The liberal arts colleges could reestablish themselves as the heart of the academic organism by leading the way in these efforts.